The Arts in Conflict in Ronsard's *Des peintures contenues dedans un tableau*

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Abstract:

Jean Plattard once suggested that, like all the major French poets of the midsixteenth century, Pierre de Ronsard overwhelmingly preferred the narrative-type,[1] historical and mythological painting produced at the Chateau de Fontainebleau by artists such as Il Rosso and Primaticcio to the concurrent genre of courtly portraiture practiced by painters such as François Clouet and Corneille de Lyon: "Les poetes donnaient naturellement a ces peintures historiques et mythologiques la preference sur les portraits." [2] The appeal, Plattard believed, was two-fold. On the one hand, there was "l'ampleur de la conception" (p. 492) of narrative painting-its conceptual magnitude, or ability to represent multiple (yet related) subject matters in a single frame. On the other hand, there was its "hardiesse et . . . liberte de l'imagination" (p. 492)-its imaginative boldness, as demonstrated by the ability of narrative painting to give form to the purely conceptual truths of ideal Nature (to borrow the Neoplatonic terminology of the period). For Plattard, Ronsard considered these qualities "comme caracteristiques du genie de la poesie et des arts en general" (p. 492).

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Jean Plattard once suggested that, like all the major French poets of the midsixteenth century, Pierre de Ronsard overwhelmingly preferred the narrative-type,[1] historical and mythological painting produced at the Chateau de Fontainebleau by artists such as Il Rosso and Primaticcio to the concurrent genre of courtly portraiture practiced by painters such as François Clouet and Corneille de Lyon: "Les poetes donnaient naturellement a ces peintures historiques et mythologiques la preference sur les portraits." [2] The appeal, Plattard believed, was two-fold. On the one hand, there was "l'ampleur de la conception" (p. 492) of narrative painting-its conceptual

magnitude, or ability to represent multiple (yet related) subject matters in a single frame. On the other hand, there was its "hardiesse et . . . liberte de l'imagination" (p. 492)-its imaginative boldness, as demonstrated by the ability of narrative painting to give form to the purely conceptual truths of ideal Nature (to borrow the Neoplatonic terminology of the period). For Plattard, Ronsard considered these qualities "comme caracteristiques du genie de la poesie et des arts en general" (p. 492).

There is no dispute that Ronsard greatly admired complexity and imaginative boldness in the arts and that he expressly sought to develop both qualities throughout his poetry.[3] However, it is far less certain that this admiration translated into a preference for narrative painting over portraiture. As I have shown in a study of the famous 1555 *Elegie a Janet*,[4] for example, Ronsard was well aware that these special qualities could also appear in portraits (especially in those by extraordinary talents like François Clouet, the official royal portraitist between 1541 and 1572). What is more, of the many poems on painting that Ronsard came to write during his career, only a few actually describe or allude to narrative pictures. Whereas Plattard's theory would imply a greater number of poems evoking historical or mythological pictures than works on portraits, an examination of Ronsard's poetry reveals just the opposite to be true.[5]

The doubts these observations raise about the tenability of Plattard's conclusions are the inspiration for the present essay. In brief, I shall analyze one of Ronsard's poems on a narrative picture in order to reassess, albeit in a preliminary way, how this art form is truly represented. Chosen for this purpose is a piece first published in the 1550 edition of the *Second livre des Odes: Des peintures contenues dedans un tableau.* [6] This ode is especially relevant in two regards. On the one hand, it represents Ronsard's sole attempt to describe a narrative picture in the form of a painting. While many of his poems refer to scenes embroidered, engraved or etched upon cloaks, cups or lutes,[7] *Des peintures* stands apart in considering a design in paint on a two-dimensional, canvas-like surface. On the other hand, it is without dispute Ronsard's most sustained effort at such a description. Of the 102 verses of the ode, 96 apply directly to the representation of the *tableau-a* five-part work consisting of three mythological episodes: the making of Jupiter's thunderbolt at Vulcan's forge (vv. 7-30), Jupiter's storm (vv. 31-48), and Juno's seduction of Jupiter (vv. 49-66); and two historical scenes: Charles V's 1535 armada assault against Tunis (vv. 67-90) and the imaginary capture of the Holy Roman Emperor by Henri II, who makes his triumphal entrance into Paris (vv. 91-102).

A direction for this investigation is suggested by the one point on which the in-depth, critical commentaries on *Des peintures* are most agreed: the thematic structure of the poem is unusually difficult to identify. Foremost among the problems noted are the very diversity of subjects presented the apparent unrelatedness of the scenes that comprise the *tableau-and* the language and style of presentation-the exceptional concision and dryness with which the *peintures* are verbally rendered. [8]

These difficulties notwithstanding, in an essay entitled, "Ronsard the Painter: A Reading of 'Des peintures contenues dedans un tableau'," Philip Ford manages not only to shed considerable light on the troubling iconography of the individual scenes, but also to uncover a unifying thematic schema in the work as a whole. [9] Through a careful analysis of the ode's many subtle, intertextual allusions to classical antecedents-including Virgil's *Aeneid* (8) and *Georgics* (1, 3 and 4), Homer's *Iliad* (18 and 23) and Heraclitus's commentaries on Homeric allegories-this critic convincingly demonstrates that "the painting can be seen as an allegory representing the struggle over the years between French monarchs and the Holy Roman Emperor, with divine providence acting as the controlling force" (p. 42).

For all its great success, however, this study does little to explain why the ode should offer such resistance to interpretation, why the signifiers (the language and style) of the poem should be at such exceptional odds with its signified (the political-historical meaning of the work). The present investigation gives priority to this very matter-i.e., to the causes of and possible purposes behind the obscurity of the poem.

Until now four primary explanations have been offered. For Terence Cave, the thematic discontinuity and semantic opacity of the ode are the more-or-less inevitable products of the poet's fondness for Homer and, above all, Pindar. Especially pertinent is the quality of "copieuse diversite," or thematic and formal complexity, that characterizes the style of these authors, and which Ronsard expressly praises in his preface to the 1550 edition of the *Odes* (1:47: 11. 91-100) (pp. 164-66). For Brian Barron, on the other hand, these qualities relate to the nature of poetry itself. In particular, they reflect Ronsard's career-long struggle with his art's simultaneous, but conflicting tendencies toward description-the verbal representation of images and scenes, as in a picture-and narration-the *parole,* or discourse, that serves to link and explain the descriptions (pp. 268-72). Still another explanation is suggested, if only implicitly, by Philip Ford himself, in a more recent article on the nature of Ronsardian *ekphrasis* (the representation in words of a work of visual art).ID There he argues that such qualities are in fact deeply rooted in Neoplatonic *ekphrasis,* the tradition whose paramount goal was the "revelation voilee d'idees metaphysiques et scientifiques, *que seuls les hommes sages et inspires sauraient penetrer"* (p. 82, my emphasis). Finally, in her study of ideal forms in the age of Ronsard, Margaret McGowan has concluded that the apparent incoherence of the poem is intended "to demonstrate the superior descriptive power of the poet." Despite its title, the ode is meant not to conjure up an actual painting, but rather to exemplify the poet's ability to create the *"idea"* (her emphasis) or a narrative picture (p. 81).

The particular merits of each theory aside, the diversity from one to the next plainly shows the lack of a consensus on the issue. With this in mind, I should like to offer yet another theory for consideration. In short, I would propose that the qualities of thematic discontinuity and conceptual obscurity in *Des peintures* might more properly relate to the nature of the narrative type of painting presented there. One might therefore suppose that these effects have been cultivated in order to demonstrate the expressive weaknesses of narrative pictures and,

conversely, the corresponding strengths of poetry. One might even conclude that *Des peintures* articulates a position (perhaps Ronsard's own) within the *Paragone* debate of the Renaissance-the centuries-old dispute over the relative superiority of the arts revived in *quattrocento* Italy (hence the term "paragone": "comparison" in Italian) by theorist-painters like Leone Battista Alberti and, especially, Leonardo da Vinci.[11]

Evidence for this theory is present from the start, in the titles of the ode: both the original formulation, *Des peintures contenues dedans un tableau,* and the f.inal version (first employed in 1555), *Les peintures d'un Paisage.* From the form of the articles alone, for example, it is clear there will be some kind of opposition between the ideas of multiplicity (indicated by the plurals, "Des" and "Les") and unity (suggested by the singular, "un"). What is more, from the linking terms "contenues dedans" and "d'un," it is evident that a synthesis will develop, a dialectical relation whereby the first idea will subsume-and ultimately supplant-the second. In addition, since the plurals modify the word "peintures" in each version, it may be assumed that the notion of multiplicity should apply to painting and, in particular, to narrative painting (an expectation confirmed, we shall see, in the poem that follows). The idea of unity, on the other hand, may be linked to poetry. The key is the reference, in the final title, to the "Palsage." Although the term was already used to denote landscape painting by the middle of the sixteenth century,[12] its capitalization here[13] invites a metaphorical reading more in keeping with Ronsard's use of the word (uncapitalized) at the opening of his 1560 *Elegie a Louis des Masures:*

Comme celui qui voit du haut d'une fenestre
Alentour de ses yeux un *paisage* champestre,
Celuy qui list les vers que j'ay portraicts ici
Regarde d'un trait d'~il meinte diverse chose
Qui bonne & mauvaise entre en mon papier enclose.
(10: 362-63, vv. 1-14, my emphasis)

Thus, to the extent the admirer of "un palsage champestre" is like the reader of the poem, it may be concluded that the "P/païsage" is a metaphor for the poem and, by extension, poetry. Finally, in so far as the *peintures* are "contenues dedans" the *Païsage,* it may be inferred that the art of poetry will effect the predicted synthesis, that the poem will bring oneness to the multipartite, narrative painting that follows.

What, though, is the precise nature of poetry's ability? The answer emerges with a clearer understanding of the concept of unity that develops within the poem itself. We therefore proceed to the opening stanza, the only more or less explicit, authorial reflection on the *tableau* as a whole:

Tableau, que l'éternelle gloire
D'un Apelle avouroit pour sien,
Ou de quelque autre dont l'histoire

Celebre le nom ancien,
Tant la couleur heureusement parfaite
A la Nature en son mort contrefaite. (vv. 1-6)

The implications underlying the paradoxical twist of verse 6 are especially important. Here, despite the hyperbolic salute to the perfection of the *tableau* in the first five lines-a perfection that even the legendary painters of Antiquity, including Apelle, would be tempted to envy-we learn that the Nature imitated is "en son mort." The negative connotation of this locution seems wholly at odds with the notions of joy, perfection and immortality that pervade the rest of the stanza. But what does this phrase, with its unusual use of the noun "mort" in the masculine, truly mean?

Following Edmond Huguet, for whom "le mort" denotes the "Etat" or "aspect d'une personne morte" *(Dictionnaire* 5, 340), Charles Guerin takes *en son mort* to mean "sur son image inanimee."[14] Paul Laumonier and Henri and Catherine Weber, on the other hand, arrive at a more figurative inter pretation. They base it on Ronsard's use of the term in the first tercet of sonnet XXIII of the 1578 *Second livre des sonets pour Helene:* "Vraye tu es farouche, & fiere en cruaute: *I* De toy fausse on jouyst en toute privaute. *I* Pres *ton mort* je m'endors, pres de luy je repose ... " (17:265, my emphasis). Drawing on a reference to the lady's "forme douteuse" in an earlier verse (v. 5: "Je fusse mort d' ennuy dans ta forme douteuse"), these critics read "mort" in the masculine to mean "fantome" or "apparition onirique."[15]

In the end, however, neither definition applies satisfactorily to the case at hand. Especially troublesome is how *Ie mort* should pertain to "Nature" –a term whose capitalization strongly suggests that it be taken in the broadest, Neoplatonic sense: i.e., as denoting both the physical world and the ideal realm of transcendent meanings and moral truths.

The solution, I believe, comes with Ronsard's reprise of the phrase in *A mes Dames*, a didactic poem published in the 1555 *Troisieme livre des Odes.* Here, while reflecting on the education of Henri II's three young daughters, and, above all, on the importance of cultivating the powers of the mind at least as devotedly as the beauty of the body, the poet evokes the analogy of a painting as the first in a series of warnings against ignoring this wisdom.

Peu de tans la beaute dure,
Et le sang qui des Rois sort,
Side l'esprit on n'a cure:
Autant vaut quelque peinture
Qui n'est vive qu'en son mort. (7: 78, vv. 71-75, my emphasis)

Especially revealing is the opposition between "esprit" -which, in the context of the poem as a whole, can only be understood as the immortal, essential quality of mind (cf. vv. 76-85)-and "beaute" -one's perishable and, hence, inessential, physical attributes. Since the poet likens a

woman whose only virtue is her beauty to a painting whose only life is "en son mort," it follows that this last phrase should designate the inessential qualities of a person or thing-that which belongs to the realm of superficial appearances, and which may therefore be said to stand in the same relation to one's true and immutable essence as Plato's shadows do to their respective Ideas. Thus considered, verse 6 of *Des peintures* may be read to say that, regardless of its perfection, the color of the *tableau* succeeds only in imitating the inessential realm of physical Nature, and, by extension, that narrative painting is unable to imitate the essential, abstract truths of ideal Nature.

Ronsard's conception of color as it relates to painting supports this theory. Not only does the poet firmly link color to the idea of physicality, but he regards it (and so physicality too) as an inextricable element of the painter's art. This poiqt is driven home at the opening of his 1564 poetic lament to Marie Stuart, in the *Elegie sur le depart de La Rayne d' Escosse:*

Comme un beau pre despouille de ses fleurs,
Comme un tableau prive de ses couleurs,
Comme le ciel, s'il perdoit ses estoilles,
La mer ses eaux, la navire ses voiles,
Ainsi perdra Ia France soucieuse
Ses ornemens, en perdant la beauté
Qui fut sa fleur, *sa couleur,* sa clarté. (12: 193-94, vv. 1-10, my emphasis)

We remark, in particular, the connection between color-as much the *sine qua non* of painting as the other analogues for Queen Marie constitute the distinguishing features of their related places and objects-and the notion of physicality, metaphorically raised in the terms "ornemens" and "beaute."[16]

To return at last to the idea of unity and to the nature of poetry's special ability to unify, then, two primary conclusions may be drawn. First, we may infer that the attainment of unity depends, in an essential way, on the expression of ideal Nature. From the association, in the opening stanza, between physical Nature and painting, and the connection, in the titles, between painting and the idea of multiplicity, we find that physical Nature relates to both painting and multiplicity: physical Nature-painting multiplicity. Accordingly, from the opposition, also in the titles, between multiplicity and unity, we may surmise that ideal Nature, as the antithesis of physical Nature (in Neoplatonic metaphysics), relates to unity: ideal Natureunity. The second conclusion follows from the first. Given the affinity, likewise connoted in the titles, between unity and poetry, we may reason that poetry enjoys a privileged relationship with ideal Nature: ideal Naturepoetry- unity. Thus, in the same way painting is qualified to imitate physical Nature, poetry is uniquely able to imitate ideal Nature; and just as the relation of painting to multiplicity follows from its links with physicality, the power of poetry to effect unity derives directly from its special ability to express abstract, transcendent meanings and moral truths.

On a certain level, then, the titles and opening sestet of *Des peintures* may be said to advance the case for the superiority of poetry over painting in the imitation of ideal Nature and, thereby, to articulate (albeit implicitly) a position, on Neoplatonic grounds, in favor of the poet's art within the *Paragone* debate of the mid-sixteenth century. But what becomes of these ideas throughout the remainder of the poem? How are they reflected in the 96 verses devoted to the *tableau* itself? The answer, I propose, bears directly on the matter of the discontinuous style that characterizes the ode and obfuscates its political-historical, allegorical dimension. More precisely, I would suggest that the appearance of discontinuity throughout the *tableau* has been carefully cultivated in order to recreate the apparent disjointedness of a real narrative painting and, in so doing, to translate into words the expressive weaknesses of that visual art form.

The precise nature and specific effects of the two stylistic features most responsible for the discontinuity of the ode lend important support to this theory. First, there is Ronsard's obvious silence about the relatedness, the overall allegorical meaning, of the five *peintures* of the poem. Such reticence is highly unusual for Ronsard. Even in those poems where his debt to the stylistic diffuseness of Horace and Pindar is most apparent, the poet typically takes great care to insure detection of the unifying, thematic framework-whether through subtle allusion or overt commentary.[17]

Evidence of this exceptional silence appears from the beginning of the *tableau* description, in stanza 2:

Où la grand bande renfrongnee
Des Cyclopes laborieus,
Est à la forge embesongnee,
Qui d'un effort industrieus
Haste un tonnerre, armure pour Ia destre
De ce grand Dieu, à le ruer adestre. (vv. 7-12).

The opening relative pronoun, *"Oil,"* is deceiving. While its link to the first word of the ode, "Tableau," raises the expectation that stanza 2 will continue the authorial commentary begun in stanza 1, and, in the process, expand it by alluding to the unifying, political-historical message of the poem, in truth no such continuity arises. As the focus shifts instantly to the images themselves all allusions to the broader significance of the painting disappear. The poet offers nothing to contextualize the episodes that follow, and so, nothing to help the reader understand their overall meaning.

This silence continues throughout the poem, as may be seen in the striking abruptness of the concluding stanza of the work:

Paris tient ses portes decloses
Recevant son Roi belliqueur,
Une grande nue de roses

Pleut à l'entour du chef vainqueur.
Les feus de joie ici & là s'alument,
Et jusque au cielles autels des Dieus fument. (vv. 97-102)

The ode simply ceases as the poet completes his account of the fifth painting. Once again Ronsard eschews all commentary, direct or indirect, that could help to establish the thematic unity underlying the five episodes of the *tableau.*

Contributing to the impression of authorical reticence are the phrases employed to conjoin the five *peintures.* Rather than use the customary signals of narrative emplotrnent, terms that might indicate something about the causal or temporal relationships between the various episodes, Ronsard opens each succeeding description with an allusion to some kind of spatial orientation. Moreover, the spatial cues selected are, in the end, nearly meaningless. However precise expressions like "Un peu plus haut" (v. 31) and" Au meilleu de" (v. 73) might first appear, they in fact never fulfill their referential promise. Missing is such essential information as the relative size of the various scenes and their orientation with respect to any of the standard, pictorial points of reference: top, bottom, left side, right side and center. The result is a sense of spatial randomness and the fundamental paradox that the *tableau* in question is virtually impossible to visualize. [18]

But what could have inspired Ronsard's silence? His primary, textual model for the ode, Virgil's painted-shield episode in *Aeneid* 8 (11. 626-730), is significantly different in this regard. However elliptical its style or great its number of spatial connectives, this Latin antecedent never conceals its prophetic meaning from the reader. Clues about the underlying symbolism of the shield's iconography are provided on a variety of levels throughout the work.[19]

A likelier source of inspiration, I suggest, is the legendary analogy attributed to the classical Greek poet, Simonides of Keos: "Painting is mute poetry; poetry a speaking painting." Not only was this aphorism a favorite topic of artistic and poetic discussion throughout Renaissance Europe, but its echo clearly resonates in many of Ronsard's own poems (d. the 1549 ode, *A Rene d'Urvoi,* vv. 1-4; his 1555 *Elegie a Janet,* vv. 95 and 192; and the 1567 *Elegie* to Marie Stuart, "Bien que le trait de vostre belle face," vv. 71-76 and 137-46). On a certain level, then, the silence in *Des peintures* may be read as Ronsard's verbal equivalent of the muteness attributed to all the pictorial (and plastic) arts since distant Antiquity. More important, though, the sense of discontinuity and confusion to which this muteness gives rise may be regarded as manifestations of the inherently limited expressivity of narrative painting alluded to, in general terms, in the titles and opening stanza.

An examination of the second source of semantic incoherence in the poem upholds this reading. It is a matter of Ronsard's emphasis on the idea of present time throughout the ode. Like the silence, this feature-evident in the extraordinarily high number of present-tense verbs and present progressive constructions (not to mention present participles used adjectivally)[20]-may be said to

undermine any sense of emplotment, both within and between the various episodes. Much as the connecting terms considered previously substitute an illusion of spatiality for the idea of causality, the poet's emphasis on present time creates an impression of simultaneity that relentlessly subverts the possible chronology of the events recounted. There is more. With the apostrophes to the reader *I* spectator ("Vous") and the other more or less explicit references to the receptor sprinkled throughout the poem,[21] Ronsard injects a sense of *nowness* into this simultaneity. As a result, the events seem to take place both all at once and at the same moment in which the reader of the poem (the spectator of the painting) experiences them.

This sense of immediacy reaches a kind of climax midway through the present-tense description of the third *peinture* (vv. 49-66: Juno's amorous seduction of Jupiter). In verses 55-60, hence at the virtual (if not properly numerical) center of the poem, Ronsard introduces a parenthetic digression, likewise in the present tense, about a picture on the richly decorated "baudrier," or warrior's girdle, that the queen of the gods has borrowed from Venus (presumably in the hope that its aphrodisiac powers will help rekindle her husband's original amatory ardor):

(La, les amours sont portraits d' ordre,
Celui qui donte les oiseaus,
Et celui qui vient ardre & mordre
Le cueur des Dauphins sous les eaus.
Leandre, proie a l'amour inhumaine,
Pendu aus flots noue ou l' amour le meine.)

There can be little doubt that the three *amours* described in this passage which Ford convincingly traces to Homer and the manifestations of Eros on Aphrodite's *cestos* in *Iliad* 14.214-17: spiritual love, impatient desire and maddening lust (37-38)-relate directly to the seduction theme of the *peinture* as a whole. Indeed, they may even symbolize the nuances of love at work in Juno's own heart and mind.

Still unclear, though, is why these images have been introduced as components of a miniature picture within this painting. Surely Ronsard owes nothing to Virgil. Never does the Roman author refer to a painting within the scenes on Aeneas' shield. Nor is it likely he drew inspiration from the Mannerist style of narrative painting practiced before or during the composition of *Des peintures,* in the late 1540s. However much painters of the day liked to juxtapose multiple scenes within a single frame,[22] contrary to what the *baudrier* stanza would imply, the number of contemporary narrative paintings found to include miniature versions of other pictures appears, in truth, rather small.[23]

Why too, we must wonder, has Ronsard marked off this passage in parentheses while simultaneously placing it at the center of the ode, one of the most privileged spots in the structure

of any (pre-modernist) literary work? Insofar as the poet normally reserves this punctuation for purely subordinate, explicatory and personal digressions,[24] such a position would seem, on the surface, wholly inappropriate. It is true that, by evoking the "Dauphins sous les eaus" in verse 58, the *baudrier* stanza anticipates the more naturalistic breed of porpoises, the "Dauphins aus dos courbes," that "nouent *I* .. . follatrent & jouent" (vv. 71-72) in the first historical scene (vv. 67-90). Thus, on one level, these lines may be judged ideally located to prepare the transition from the mythological beginning of the ode *(peintures* 1-3) to its historical ending *(peintures* 4-5). Nevertheless, should not such an important structural function preclude the use of parentheses?

A solution to these queries may be found, I propose, in the contribution the *baudrier* sestet makes to the quality of simultaneity that develops in the ode. First, by including a description in the present tense of a miniature picture within the description, also in the present tense, of a painting that, we recall, is itself but a component of the present-tense description of the *tableau* as a whole, Ronsard succeeds in reinforcing the impression that all parts of the poem exist synchronously and, so again, in imitating in words a work of visual art (this time, the ability of a painting to present its multiple elements to the viewer at the same instant). Second, by enclosing this passage in parentheses while paradoxically placing it at the center of the ode, the poet manages not only to underscore his mimetic accomplishment, but also to draw attention to the subversive effects of such synchronousness on the ability of the narrative painter to express the transcendent meanings of ideal Nature. Indeed, by selecting this maneuver Ronsard may be said to assign a thematic role to this idea that rivals in importance the historical allegorical message of the poem.[25]

This insistence on the disadvantages of pictorial simultaneity is, I believe, the most convincing evidence of Ronsard's involvement in the *Paragone* debate of the period. By addressing this feature, Ronsard confronts a central premise on which Renaissance art theorists-and, above all, Leonardo da Vinci[26]-based their claims for the painter's superiority over the poet. The 23rd treatise of Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura* (ca. 1498) raises this very issue in connection with another concern of the *Paragone* dispute, the relative worth of the senses of sight (the domain of the painter) and hearing (the province of the poet):

> La pittura ti rapresenta *in un'subito* Ia sua essentia nella uirtu uisius
> e per il proprio mezzo donde Ia impressiua riceue li obbietti naturali
> . .. ; e Ia poesia rifferisce il medesimo, rna con mezzo meno degno
> che I' occhio, il quale porta nella impressiva *pi it confusamente e con pi it tardita* le figurationi delle cose nominate, che non fa I' occhio .. . .
> ["Painting presents its subject to thee *in one instant* through the
> sense of sight, through the same organ that transmits the natural
> objects to the mind; . . . Poetry transmits the same subject through a
> sense which is less noble and which impresses on the mind the
> shapes of the objects it describes *more slowly and confusedly* than the
> eye . .. . "](Richter, p. 61; my emphasis)

A similar argument appears in *Trattato* 22, only here Leonardo expands on the notion that a subject presented *all at once* by a painter is inherently more intelligible (and true to Nature27) than the same subject rendered by a poet through the time-bound medium of verbal language:

> Hor uedi, che differentia e dal udire raccontare una cosa, che da piacere al occhio *con lunghezza di tempo,* o uederla *con quella prestezza,* che si uedono le cose naturali. et anchora che le cose de' poeti sieno con longho interuallo di tempo Jette, spesse sono le uolte, che *le non sonno intese e bisogna farli sopra diuersi comenti,* de' quali rarissime uolte tali comentatori intendono, qual'fusse Ia mente del poeta . . . Ma l'opera del pittore *immediate e compresa* dalli suoi risguardatori. ["Now look what difference there is between listening *for a long time* to a tale about something which gives pleasure to the eye and actually seeing it *all at once* as works of nature are seen. Moreover, the works of poets are read at long intervals; *they are often not understood and require many explanations,* and commentators very rarely know what was in the poet's mind ... But the work of the painter is *immediately understood* by its beholders."] (Richter, p. 60; my emphasis)

On a certain level, then, *Des peintures* may be read as a Ronsard's reply, on behalf of poetry, to Renaissance arguments like Leonardo's that ascribe the superiority of painting to its inherent synchronousness and immediate intelligibility.

To summarize, good grounds exist to assume that *Des peintures* does far more than allegorize the struggle between Henri II and Charles V and the role played by the gods in insuring a French victory. Based upon our examination of the title, the opening stanza and the principal features responsible for the obscure appearance of the work, we find that it may also be read as an attack on the expressive weaknesses of painting-specifically narrative painting-and that, perhaps, it represents a rebuttal to the theories exalting the painter over the poet advanced by Renaissance art theorists like Leonardo da Vinci.

Still uncertain, though, is how the ode has demonstrated the other thesis raised in the title and first sestet: the converse proposition which would place the superior ability to imitate ideal Nature in the pen of the poet. The answer, I submit, is surprisingly simple. For what clearer proof of this ability is there than the success of the poem in carrying at least two major ideas (its historical-allegorical message and, as the present study has attempted to show, a statement of Ronsard's position in the *Paragone* debate) and the fact that both ideas are-despite the discontinuous design of the work-comprehensible?

This last point raises one final question. Why are we able to understand the ode at all? If it is true that a narrative painting is "en son mort" with respect to ideal Nature, how is it *Des peintures* can coherently express any abstract concept after the effort Ronsard puts into imitating the two most essential properties of the pictorial arts, their muteness and visual synchronousness? The answer,

I propose, relates to the nature of poetry itself. More precisely, it pertains to the intrinsic diachrony-or more properly, sequentiality-of poetry's medium of verbal language. For in the end, the ideas raised in this ode are too complex to be apprehended in an instant. They are the products of an evolution that depends upon the sequential disposition of words or, in the present case, upon the ode's movement from the first *peinture* to the fifth, from its mythological beginning to its historical end. Ronsard doubtless realizes this dependency. Indeed, it is the underlying reason for the simultaneous, opposing tendency of *Des peinture* toward confusion, as a *tableau,* and meaning, as a poem.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

1. My understanding of "narrative painting" is based, in part, on the use of the term by Erwin and Dora Panofsky in "The Iconography of the Galerie François Ier at Fontainebleau," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1958): 113-90. Equally influential, however, has been the definition advanced by Wendy Steiner in *Pictures of Romance* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 2: "Of the many conditions contributing to [pictorial] narrativity, the most important are: that the painting present more than one temporal moment; that a subject be repeated from one moment to another; and that the subject be embedded in at least a minimally realistic setting."

2. Jean Plattard, "Les Arts et les artistes de Ia Renaissance française juges par les ecrivains du temps," *RHLF* 21 (1914): 481-502.

3. Cf. the preface to the 1550 edition of the *Odes* (1:47: 11. 91-100) and the *Abbrege de l'art poetique franr;ois* (especially on "invention": 14: Uff).

4. "A Poem to a Painter: The *Elegie a Janet* and Ronsard's Dilemma of Ambivalence," *French Forum* 12 (1987): 273-87.

5. Cf. my unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Pierre and the *Paragone:* The Rivalry Between Poetry and Painting in the Works of Pierre de Ronsard" (diss. University of Pennsylvania 1989}, pp. 69 and 187-221.

6. Pierre de Ronsard, *CEucres completes,* ed. Paul Laumonier, 1 (Paris: Hachette, 1931), 259-64. All citations of *Des peintures* are taken from this edition; all other citations of, or allusions to, Ronsard's works are likewise to Laumonier's edition and will be noted parenthetically, as appropriate, with references to volume, page and verse.

7. Cf., respectively, *Le ravissement de Cephale* (2: 133-47), *La Bergerie* (13: 75-131), *A sa guiterre* (1: 229-34) and *La Lyre* (15: 15-38).

8. Cf. Margaret McGowan, *Ideal Forms in the Age of Ronsard* (University of California Press, 1985), pp. 81, 83; Brian Barron, "'Ut Pictura poesis': un lieu commun de la Renaissance et son importance dans l'reuvre de Ronsard" (diss. University of Edinburgh 1981), p. 269; Terence Cave, *Ronsard the Poet* (London: Methuen, 1973), p. 164.

9. *French Studies* 40 (1986): 32-44.

10. "La Fonction de I' ekphrasis chez Ronsard," *Ronsard en son IV• centennaire: I: Art de poesie,* ed. Yvonne Bellenger et at., *Etudes Ronsardiennes* II (Geneva: Droz, 1989).

11. For background on the *Paragone* between poetry and painting, see Jean Paul Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci,* 3rd ed. (1883; rpt. New York: Phaidon, 1970) I, 13-22 and 41-68; Rensselaer Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: Norton, 1967}, esp. pp. 56-61.; W.}. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (University of Chicago, 1986), esp. pp. 116-21., Leatrice Mendelsohn, *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi's "Due Lezzioni" and Cinquecento Art Theory* (University of Michigan Press, 1982). Regarding the *Paragone* in Ronsard's *reuvre,* though between poetry and architecture, see Doranne Fenoaltea, *Du palais au jardain: /'architecture des "Odes" de Ronsard* (Etudes Ronsardiennes, 3), (Geneva: Droz, 1990), pp. 16-26.

12. Cf. the *Elegie a Louis des Masures* (10:362-70), esp. vv. 1-14. For more on the history of the word "palsage," see Huguet, *Dictonnaire de la langue franfaise,* 5 (Paris: Didier, 1961). Cf., also, Lucile M. Golson, "Landscape Prints and Landscapists of the School of Fontainebleau," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts,* 73 (Feb. 1969): 95-110.

13. I base my comments on the rendering of the word as it consistently appeared in the body of the work beginning in 1555 and as Laumonier has transcribed it in his notes on editions (p. 259). It is nevertheless true that, in the *Table des Odes* for each edition in which the revised title was used (1555, 1560, 1567, 1571, 1573 and 1578), a lower-case "p" was supplied by the editor-publisher.

14. Guerin, *Les Odes de Ronsard* (Paris: Cedre, 1952), p. 385.

15. Laumonier 17: 264-65; H. and C. Weber, *Les Amours de Pierre de Ronsard* (Paris: Garnier, 1963), p. 835.

16. Louis Le Caron notes the same essential link between painting and color in his fourth *Dialogue:* "Aucuns escrivent la fable estre en la poesie, ce que la couleur en la peinture, laquelle a plus de force que la ligne, pour faire regarder l'image bien tiree.. . *"(Dialogues,* eds. Joan A. Buhlmann and Donald Gilman [Geneva: Droz, 1986], p. 270).

17. Cf. the ode *A Michel de l'Hospital* (3:118-63). However complex this poem may be, Ronsard never lets us forget that the central story (relating the mythological origins of the muses and their divine powers) is above all an allegory intended to praise his friend and advocate, Michel de l'Hospital, and, by extension, to attack his detractors at court.

18. Cf. Cave (p. 164) and Ford (p. 32).

19. Cf. *Aeneid,* 11. 626-29: "Illic res Italas Romanorumque triumphos / haud vatum ignarus venturique inscius aevi *I* fecerat Ignipotens, illic genus omne futurae / stirpis ab Ascanio pugnataque in ordine bella." ("There the story of Italy and the triumphs of Rome had the lord of Fire fashioned, not unversed in prophecy, or unknowing of the age to come; there, every generation of the stock to spring from Ascanius, and the wars they fought one by one"] *(Virgil,* tran. H. Rushton Fairclough, 2 [Harvard University Press, 1954], 102-03).

20. Careful inspection uncovers 58 examples of the present tense (including passive forms) and 24 present-progressive constructions as compared to only three instances of the past tense.

21. Cf. the reference to "on" in verse 74. See also the analogies directed to the same receptor: "Comme un etang" (v. 30); "En forme de lances errans" (v. 46); "Egalle aus chans" (v. 48); and "Comme grandes forests" (v. 74). For more on the function of analogies as signals of the receptor-narratee, see Gerald Prince, "Introduction a l'etude du narrataire," *Poetique* 14 (1973): 178-96, esp. 185.

22. Cf. John Shearman, *Mannerism* (1967; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 21-22 and Jacques Bousquet, *Mannerism: The Painting and Style of the Late Renaissance,* tran. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Braziller, 1964).

23. Admittedly, this observation is purely empirical and, so, remains open to amendment. For a complete list of the essays and art catalogues consulted on this matter, see my dissertation bibliography (pp. 243-46).

24. Cf., among many other poems, the ode *A Jouachim du Bellai Angevin* (1: 108-21, vv. 85, 106, 190) and the ode *A Bouju Angevin* (1: U1-25, vv. 5-6).

25. Françoise Joukovsky draws a similar conclusion in *Le Bel objet: les paradis artificiels de Ia P/eiade* (Paris: Champion, 1991), p. 61.

26. It is true that certain details of Leonardo's arguments would remain hidden until the first publication of the *Trattato,* in 1651 (in Paris). Nevertheless, thanks to France's frequent military, political and social exchanges with Italy (not the least relevant of which were Leonardo's associations with Louis XII in Milan, between 1506 and 1513, and his move to Am boise at the invitation of François I, in 1516), there can be little doubt that the essence of his thinking had reached French cultural leaders by the middle of the sixteenth century. For more on the history of the *Trattato* manuscripts, see Richter, pp. 5-11. For concrete evidence of Leonardo's legacy in early sixteenthcentury France, see Geofroy Tory, *Champ Fleury,* ed. Gustave Cohen (Paris: Charles Bosse, 1931), pp. XIII (r), XXXIV (v), XXXV (r) and XLVI (v); and P. Durrieu, *Les Relations de Leonard de Vinci avec le peintre fram;ais Jean Perreal* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1919), pp. 7-8.

27. The relation between simultaneity and trueness to Nature receives its most striking development in Leonardo's battle-scene example. See *Trattato* 15 (Richter, p. 53) and *Trattato* 22 (Richter, p. 60).